

2007

Using picture books to enhance content area reading

Tamra C. Foster
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©2007 Tamra C. Foster

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Foster, Tamra C., "Using picture books to enhance content area reading" (2007). *Graduate Research Papers*. 668.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/668>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Using picture books to enhance content area reading

Abstract

A child's academic success in the intermediate grades relies heavily on how well he or she can read and understand content area material (Abadiano & Turner, 2002; Allington, 2000; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Neufeld, 2005). This study examined the effect of using picture books as a pre-reading activity to enhance students' content area comprehension, vocabulary development, and interest level. Four students performing above grade level, one student performing at grade level, and three students performing below grade level participated in this study. Social studies curriculum was presented to the students via a textbook for two units. Picture books were added as a supplemental tool to the content area textbook for the third and final unit.

Students were assessed using end-of-unit tests, a survey, and a thought-bubble picture activity. The results indicated that students who typically perform below grade level performed better on their end-of-unit tests where picture books were utilized. In addition, student vocabulary knowledge and interest level increased when picture books were read aloud before reading the textbook.

USING PICTURE BOOKS TO ENHANCE CONTENT AREA READING

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Literacy Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Tamra C. Foster

August 2007

This research paper by: Tamra C. Foster

Titled: Using picture books to enhance content area reading

Has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts in Education

8/20/07

Date Approved

8/22/07

Date Approved

8-23-07

Date Approved

Deborah Tidwell

Graduate Faculty Reader

Donna S. Douglas

Graduate Faculty Reader

Mary C. Herring

Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

A child's academic success in the intermediate grades relies heavily on how well he or she can read and understand content area material (Abadiano & Turner, 2002; Allington, 2000; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Neufeld, 2005). This study examined the effect of using picture books as a pre-reading activity to enhance students' content area comprehension, vocabulary development, and interest level. Four students performing above grade level, one student performing at grade level, and three students performing below grade level participated in this study. Social studies curriculum was presented to the students via a textbook for two units. Picture books were added as a supplemental tool to the content area textbook for the third and final unit. Students were assessed using end-of-unit tests, a survey, and a thought-bubble picture activity. The results indicated that students who typically perform below grade level performed better on their end-of-unit tests where picture books were utilized. In addition, student vocabulary knowledge and interest level increased when picture books were read aloud before reading the textbook.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Rationale.....	2
Purpose of the study.....	2
Importance of the study.....	3
Terminology.....	4
Research questions.....	5
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Introduction.....	6
Barriers to understanding textbooks.....	6
Benefits of reading aloud using picture books in the content area.....	11
How reading aloud benefits motivation, comprehension and vocabulary.....	16
How to select reading aloud material.....	25
How to read aloud.....	28
Conclusions.....	31
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY.....	33
Introduction.....	33
Setting.....	34
Participants.....	34
Procedures.....	35
Data analysis.....	37

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS.....	39
Introduction.....	39
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	56
Conclusions.....	56
Limitations.....	59
Recommendations.....	59
REFERENCES.....	61
APPENDIX A.....	68
APPENDIX B.....	71
APPENDIX C.....	72

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Many children make their way through the early elementary school years without demonstrating much difficulty with reading. However, reading demands increase dramatically in fourth grade because learning relies more heavily on textbooks (Allington, 2002).

Reading is more than decoding sounds to read words. An essential element of the reading process is comprehension, or understanding what is read (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Comprehension is especially important when reading in the content areas, such as social studies and science. Students are expected to process and apply information gleaned from reading their textbooks (Myers & Savage, 2005). To accomplish this task, students at intermediate grades need strategies to help them comprehend the information presented in textbooks. Processing a textbook full of information is a skill that is used daily in the classroom. However, learning this skill is harder than it may seem (Myers & Savage). Many students, who have received satisfactory grades in the past, may begin to struggle with content area reading (Allington, 2002). These students may become frustrated and fail because they are unsure of how to navigate through the text, the text is too hard to read and understand, or the students lack interest in the topic (Allington; Biancarosa, 2005; Budiansky, 2001; Dunn, 2000; Fordham, Wellman & Sandmann, 2002; Passe, 2006).

According to Trelease (1989), 'nearly all children begin school with the expectation they'll learn to read and that it will be fun. By fourth grade the great expectations are over and disillusionment sets in' (p. 11). When students enter the

intermediate grades they are suppose to be able to combine all the reading skills acquired up until this point so they can begin learning from textbooks. However, for many students, this is a very difficult task.

Rationale

A child's academic success in the intermediate grades relies heavily on how well he or she can read and understand content area material (Abadiano & Turner, 2002; Allington, 2000; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Neufeld, 2005). Teachers and parents have observed how frustrating it can be for students to navigate through and learn from a textbook packed full of information. Teachers have observed how difficult this task is for Title I students and other students who struggle with reading. Children who struggle with reading are overwhelmed with the task of comprehending information from content area textbooks (Abadiano & Turner; Harvey & Goudvis).

Purpose of the Study

Many students in the intermediate grades do not have the strategies to process and comprehend the information presented in their grade level textbook (Neufeld, 2005). Villano (2005) discussed how her students struggled to navigate their textbooks and understand the content. She stated, "When my struggling readers, and even average readers, are presented with a fifth-grade level textbook that discusses the abstract intricacies of history, their abilities to comprehend begins to plummet" (p. 122). This type of frustration is consistently found in intermediate grades throughout the country (Allington, 2002; Villano). Teachers everywhere witness the struggle poor readers have with understanding textbooks and *how* to read them (Myers & Savage, 2005). Textbooks are not designed for the below-average or even average readers (Chall &

Conrad, 1991; Tyree, Fiore, & Cook, 1994; Vaughn & Edmonds, 2006; Villano, 2005). Using picture books is one reading strategy that can help the struggling reader, as well as the average reader, to better understand text (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a; 2006b; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993). Picture books provide vivid illustrations and photos that support the text. In addition, pictures help students to visualize and bring ideas together. Picture books are one resource teachers can use to build prior knowledge and to enhance student understanding of content area subjects. This paper presents ways that teachers can use picture books as a pre-reading activity to help students improve their comprehension, vocabulary and learning from informational text.

Importance of the Study

Recently, raising achievement scores has captured the attention of educators and policy makers (Allington, 2002). Most of this attention has been focused on improving reading instruction in the primary years (preschool through third grade). Little effort has been made to improve the reading proficiencies of students in grades 4-12, which many experts believe are the grades that need improvement (Allington, 2002). With the push for higher achievement, textbook companies are producing more and more difficult textbooks. However, with more complex text structure and more sophisticated vocabulary, these textbooks make it more difficult to foster growth in content area learning. The added complexities of textbook format, structure and writing style are too difficult for many students to understand. Therefore, many students have a difficult time learning from the content area textbook. Students who struggle with reading need even more strategies to help them understand content area texts. This literature review examines the use of picture books to enhance content area comprehension.

Terminology

For the purpose of this paper, the following terms are defined based upon their use within the related research and review of literature:

- **Textbook:** A book used in the study of a subject (example: social studies) (Pike & Mumper, 2004).
- **Content area reading:** Read in the curriculum areas such as social studies, history or science (Pike & Mumper, 2004).
- **Read-aloud:** The teacher reads aloud to the class and the students listen (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).
- **Interactive read-aloud:** The teacher reads aloud and pauses at significant points, asks students for comments or questions, and invites a brief discussion (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).
- **Picture books:** A book which contains both text and illustrations that complement each other (Bader, 1976; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003)
- **Nonfiction:** A genre that provides ideas, facts, and principles organized around main ideas, using both verbal and visual texts (Pike & Mumper, 2004).
- **Informational text:** Texts that convey information about the natural and social world. (A subcategory of nonfiction) (Duke, 2003).
- **Pre-reading:** Activities done prior to reading a textbook to strengthen the relationship between what the students already know and what is provided in the text (Richardson & Morgan, 2003). In addition, pre-reading activities instill curiosity, motivation and promote exchange of ideas (Ryder & Graves, 2003).

- **Comprehension:** The processes of constructing a supportable understanding of a text (Neufeld, 2005).
- **Vocabulary:** Key terminology that is an important part of teaching in the content areas; a new concept represented by words (McKenna & Robinson, 2006).
- **Text structure:** The way the information in the text is organized for presentation (Neufeld, 2005).

Research Questions

The following research was driven by the overarching question: Does the use of picture books during pre-reading activities improve students' reading comprehension of grade level content area textbooks? Two secondary questions that stem from this primary question are as follows:

- Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase the students' understanding of vocabulary words when reading the content area textbook?
- Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase students' interest in the content area textbook?

These questions are explored further in a review of the relevant literature addressed in the next section.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This review of the relevant literature reports on past research related to using picture books to enhance content area reading. The review is divided into five subcategories: barriers to understanding textbooks, the benefits of reading aloud using picture books in the content area, how reading aloud benefits motivation, comprehension and vocabulary, how to select read aloud material, and how to read aloud.

Textbooks are an integral part of instruction for many classrooms. Classrooms across the United States primarily rely on textbooks to teach content area curriculum (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). "By the time most students complete high school, they will have been exposed to over 32,000 pages in textbooks" (Chall & Conard, 1991, p.1). Textbooks are one component of the total curriculum and can be used to provide a general organizational framework. Schools typically purchase multiple copies of the same science or social studies textbook for every student. However, a *one-size-fits all* approach does not necessarily work for all students.

Barriers to Understanding Textbooks

According to the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NEAP] (2004; 2005), struggling adolescent readers make up a substantial portion of the United States school population. These adolescents are expected to read math, science, and social studies textbooks in order to learn specific content material. For most of these students, reading textbooks and expository texts poses a challenge that contributes to difficulty in becoming successful in school (Abadiano & Turner, 2002;

Allington, 2000). One of the challenges for struggling readers is navigating through a textbook. Many students have not been exposed to a textbook or expository material before entering fourth grade. In addition, students have a difficult time understanding the complex vocabulary words, the convoluted structure of a textbook, and they are overwhelmed at the massive amount of information in a textbook. 'This [reading challenge] is an unfortunate reality inasmuch as by fourth grade students read more expository material to gain content information' (Abadiano & Turner, p. 49).

Many students are lugging home heavy textbooks that they cannot understand nor read. A number of studies suggest reading expository text is difficult because of the nature of its organizational structure (Abadiano & Turner, 2002; Budiansky, 2001; Myers & Savage, 2005; Neufeld, 2005; Passe, 2006; Ryder & Graves, 2003; Vaughn & Edmonds, 2006; Villano, 2005).

One major problem reflected in the organization of textbooks is that there are many facts and vocabulary words imbedded in the pages. Researchers Vardell, Hadaway and Young (2006) state, "one common mistake in textbooks is presenting too many new words too quickly" (p. 738). Too much information and unfamiliar terms can be very overwhelming to students. In addition, textbooks are full of "sidebars, boxes, and other presumably eye-catching special features" (Budiansky, 2001, p. 26). Today's textbooks are larger and flashier than textbooks in the past. They are full of colorful photographs, diagrams, activities, mini experiments and sidebars about current issues. The claim is often made that today's generation of students have short attention spans and that books need to be filled with eye catching features that will grab the students' attention (Budiansky).

However, one study suggests students are overwhelmed and confused by all the text features found on the pages of a textbook:

Children do not naturally respond to the illustrations, graphics, and highlighted items in text and actually need instruction in how to make sense of these text features. Some children try to read through a whole page from top to bottom as if it were a *traditional* [italics added] text and become confused by the sudden jumps into sidebar material and captions; others look at the picture captions but never read the text; some read the text but never read the lesson titles. (Budiansky, 2001, p. 26)

Budiansky's work is consistent with other textbook research (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Myers & Savage, 2005; Villano, 2005). A number of researchers agree that students do not have the necessary skills or knowledge to navigate through a textbook and are overwhelmed with the task of comprehending the information.

Another barrier that students face when reading textbooks is the expository writing style (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Researchers often describe expository writing, such as a textbook, as 'inconsiderate text' (Abadiano & Turner, 2002, p. 49). Information provided in a textbook that is too densely packed, assumes too much prior knowledge of the students, has too many missing cohesive connections, and too much irrelevant information is considered to be inconsiderate text (Abadiano & Turner; Budiansky, 2001; Harvey & Goudvis). Another issue of inconsiderate text is that textbooks tend to go for breadth rather than depth (Fordham, Wellman & Sandmann, 2002; Villano, 2005). A typical textbook summarizes a specific topic in just two or three paragraphs (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005). However, it would take thousands of pages to cover a single

topic in great detail. 'Textbooks, no matter how well researched or how well written, have so much content to cover that the depth of study on a specific topic within any text will be limited' (Laninack & Wadsowrth, 2006a, p.150-151). Zarnowski and Gallagher (1993) agree that specific topics that are reduced to a page, a paragraph or even a single line in a textbook, could be the focus of several books.

Other researchers suggest reading expository text is difficult because, in many school districts, textbooks are not provided before the intermediate grades (Passe, 2006; Pike & Mumper, 2004). Students exit their primary school years without being exposed to the basic concepts, skills and organization of textbooks (Passe, 2006). Children who have not had experience with expository writing styles in early elementary school often find it difficult to read and comprehend these types of texts (Villano, 2005).

Few books outside of school are written in the same manner as a textbook. The writing styles found in textbooks do not prepare kids for the authentic nonfiction reading that they will do in their lifetime. In order to condense content into fewer words, textbooks often use passive voice and reiterations to explain new ideas (Abadiano & Turner, 2002). The vocabulary words used in textbooks are often abstract and technical (Abadiano & Turner; Angelillo, 2003; Richardson & Morgan, 2003). In addition, some researchers suggest that writing styles in textbooks can be dry and can easily bore their readers (Billman, 2002; Doiron, 1994; Dunn, 2000; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Most authentic nonfiction reading outside of school, or as adults, is structured very differently. Nonfiction reading often includes the Internet, newspapers, magazines, sports scores, editorials, movie listings, advertisements, recipes, phone bills, maps, dosage labels, book reviews, and grocery lists (Angelillo, 2003; Harvey & Goudvis,

2000). In fact, when adults are researching content they rarely search for information from a textbook (Allington, 2002; Angelillo, 2003). According to Allington, "Adults use the easiest texts they can find when they want to learn about a new topic. [So] why do these same adults think that hard books are good for children and adolescents?" (p. 18). The development of textbooks rarely takes into consideration real-life nonfiction reading.

Students with reading and learning difficulties also find reading content area textbooks especially challenging (Abadiano & Turner, 2002). Reluctant readers become easily overwhelmed at the massive amounts of information presented in textbooks (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). In addition, "because academic knowledge is often acquired through reading, poor readers often lose out on content learning due to reduced reading skills" (Montali & Lewandowski, 1996). However, these students are presented with the same expectations as other students. Districts select textbooks for their congruity with state and local objectives (Dunn, 2000; Passe, 2006; Villano, 2005) and not for their ability to be user friendly for all students.

Organizational structure, expository writing style, and lack of exposure at the primary grades are just a few of the areas identified as trouble spots for students entering the intermediate grades when interacting with and learning from textbooks. Although textbooks are a major source for instruction and reading in most classrooms, teachers are realizing that they need to find additional materials to supplement the curriculum in order for students to make sense of the content (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Myers & Savage, 2005). Textbooks are only one way for students to learn content area information. The use of picture books can help readers make sense of text. "Trade books

haven't yet replaced textbooks as a staple in classrooms, but many teachers are realizing the appeal of high-quality picture books for instruction' (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 53).

The Benefits of Reading Aloud Using Picture Books in the Content Areas

Researchers suggest that one approach to enhance content area knowledge is to supplement the curriculum by reading aloud to students using picture books (Billman, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Pike & Mumper, 2004; Richardson & Morgan, 2003; Tiedt, 2000; Trelease, 1989; Villano, 2005; Wysocki, 2004; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993). The picture book is often an overlooked reference for teaching in the content areas.

Traditionally, picture books have been viewed as a genre reserved solely for young children (Billman, 2002; Fordham, Wellman & Sandmann, 2002; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Secondary and intermediate grade teachers rarely use picture books in their teaching because they believe this type of text is too immature for adolescents (Billman, 2002; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Tiedt, 2000). However, picture books are not just for elementary school children. Trelease (1989) suggests that there is "no time to stop the use of picture books" (p. 59). He continues, "picture books should be on the reading list of every class in every grade throughout all twelve years of school" (p. 60). Picture books move people. Beautiful stories and stirring pictures can inspire young children as well as older children. Picture books are increasingly being written for middle-grade readers, and teachers are finally acknowledging their educational possibilities (Billman, 2002; Doiron, 1994; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Tiedt, 2000; Wysocki, 2004).

Laminack and Wadsworth (2006b) suggest that using picture books with content area curriculum is a natural way to help students understand the content.

Throughout history, story has been one of the primary means of passing on all that is important to families and communities and cultures from one generation to the next. Story has helped us develop a sense of who we are and where we come from. Story has helped us come to know ourselves in relation to others. It has been through story that we begin to understand times past and begin to shape our hopes for the future. The social studies curriculum is rich with opportunities to mine the treasures in literature; story is therefore a natural vehicle in this rich and robust curriculum. (p. 139)

Although researchers support the use of picture books in the classroom to enhance the curriculum, some teachers are still hesitant. Many teachers view reading aloud as “one more thing to do in an already full day” (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006b, p. 208). However, researchers suggest that teachers should view reading aloud as a thoughtful, planful, and reflective instructional act that can be incorporated into a daily routine in the content areas (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Wysocki, 2004). Using a picture book as a read aloud can be an efficient use of time and provide teachers with exciting possibilities for teaching (Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993).

All students can benefit from picture books, especially reluctant readers (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Villano, 2005). The illustrations and pictures complement the text to help reluctant readers visualize and access meaning. Picture books cover a wide range of themes, issues, words and ideas, regardless of different learning style, age, reading level, or experience (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Harvey and Goudvis note that educators need to promote books by reading them aloud to students, both fiction and nonfiction, and

picture books are no exception. Teachers most often use fiction picture books as their read aloud material. However, nonfiction picture book resources “with lively, well-written text also have their place” (Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993, p. 1). Tiedt (2000) agrees that nonfiction picture books should not be overlooked. She states, “You will be amazed to see the many illustrated books that deal with a variety of topics—animals, geology, history, diverse cultures, language, and so on” (p. 11). Both fiction and nonfiction picture books can be great supplemental resources to use throughout the entire curriculum.

At first, older students may cringe when teachers read and share a picture book with them (Tiedt, 2000). However, their negative comments will not last long when they encounter a powerful picture book that is filled with sophisticated content best suited for their age level (Billman, 2002; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). When reluctant readers see teachers and proficient readers choosing picture books, they will choose them, too (Harvey & Goudvis).

The benefits that come from reading aloud complement the entire curriculum (Trelease, 1989). Picture books offer a wide range of themes and issues that can be effective for teaching content. There has been a recent explosion in nonfiction trade book publishing. Technology has made the mass production of visually appealing curricular trade books more accessible. In addition, teachers have greater access to these trade books, which makes it possible to teach almost any genre or topic with picture books and other nonfiction text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Fordham, Wellman and Sandmann (2002) agree that “in the past decade, no aspect of the children’s publishing industry has changed as much as the production of nonfiction trade books” (p. 156). The books are more visually stimulating, with colorful illustrations and photographs that engage readers.

A significant amount of research has been done on the benefits of using picture books. A number of educators have written extensively on the use of children's literature in classrooms (Allen, 2000; Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Carr, Buchanan, Wentz, Weiss & Brant, 2001; Fordham, Wellman & Sandmann, 2002; Gregg & Sekeres, 2006; Hansen, 2001; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Kurkjian, Livingston & Cobb, 2006; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Tiedt, 2000; Trelease, 1989; Villano, 2005; Wysocki, 2004; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993). Incorporating informational books and other forms of expository text into the classroom has a number of important advantages. The following are some of the many benefits of reading aloud to students in the content areas. Reading picture books aloud can:

- Build and expand vocabulary and word knowledge (Allen, 2000; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Trelease, 1989; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Model intonation and pleasure for reading (Allen, 2000; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Tiedt, 2000);
- Introduce oral language activities (Tiedt, 2000; Trelease, 1989);
- Teach grammar and style (Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Tiedt, 2000);
- Stimulate writing (Hansen, 2001; Tiedt, 2000);
- Explain interesting information about different cultures, historical periods, and geographical regions (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Tiedt, 2000; Villano, 2005);
- Present part of our literacy heritage (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Tiedt, 2000);

- Expose students to a variety of genres (Tiedt, 2000; Wysocki, 2004);
- Increase motivation (Allen, 2000; Carr et al., 2001; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Trelease, 1989);
- Provide easier material for less able readers (Carr et al., 2001; Gregg & Sekeres, 2006);
- Focus more in depth on one issue or topic at a time (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Fordham Wellman & Sandmann, 2002; Villano, 2005; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Build background knowledge for a unit of study (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Bring together ideas, images, content, language and art (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000);
- Stimulate student comprehension (Allen, 2000; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Trelease, 1989);
- Offer multiple perspectives (Zarnowski & Gallagher),
- Help students identify with characters (Carr et al., 2001; Villano, 2005; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Improve listening skills (Allen, 2000; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Trelease, 1989; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Reduce discipline problems (Allen, 2000);
- Arouse curiosity, imagination, and stretches attention spans (Trelease, 1989);
- Improve student engagement (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b);

- Strengthen speaking skills (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Trelease, 1989);
- Nurture and acknowledge emotional development (Trelease, 1989);
- Help students visualize what they cannot imagine as a result of their limited experiences (Hansen, 2001; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b);
- Expose students to art through illustrations (Hansen, 2001; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Wysocki, 2004); and
- Broaden understanding of the world (Kurkjian, Livingston & Cobb, 2006; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003).

Picture books are extraordinarily effective for teaching content (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Research has shown that reading aloud to students in the intermediate grades can significantly increase motivation, vocabulary development, and comprehension (Allen, 2000; Carr et al., 2001; Harvey & Goudvis; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Trelease, 1989; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993).

How reading aloud benefits motivation, comprehension, and vocabulary. In the U.S. we live in a print rich society, and students who enjoy reading are definitely at an advantage over students who dislike reading or have difficulties with reading (Zambo, 2006). Attitudes toward reading can affect academic grades, performance on tests, and the overall success in school (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Trelease, 1989; Zambo, 2006). According to Trelease, 'When 101 reading teachers listed their nine most important instructional priorities, improving attitudes towards reading was rated second only to comprehension' (p. 17). Fordham, Wellman, and Sandman (2002) agree that maximizing

student comprehension and interest are very important goals. Good readers who are motivated will continue to succeed; where as struggling students will lose interest and, perhaps, fail. Teachers are recognizing that they have a responsibility to motivate children to read different types of texts in order for all students to have success in school.

One approach to maximizing students' attitudes towards reading is through exposure to picture books (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Carr et al., 2001; Doiron, 1994; Gregg & Sekeres, 2006; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Myers & Savage, 2005; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Trelease, 1989). 'Perhaps if we read more nonfiction aloud and foster children's curiosity and interest in information, reading expository text will become more natural and easier for children' (Doiron, 1994, p. 618).

Picture books are designed to be more interesting and more relevant to children than a textbook (Carr et al., 2001; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Both fiction and nonfiction picture books are more likely to hold students' attention and engage them 'than a dry, formulaic text' (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 46). Authors of picture books and trade books have a special way of keeping a reader engaged. Picture book authors use a rhetorical style of writing that brings the reader into the story or context which makes the story both appealing and more interesting (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005). Student motivation also increases because picture books focus on a single concept in more detail than a textbook (Fordham, Wellman & Sandmann, 2002; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a; Villano, 2005; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993). For example, in a textbook, a child might read one paragraph about the Mississippi River, whereas in a picture book a child can read or listen to a whole book about the Mississippi River. Picture books have more depth of content. Moreover, there are many picture books about

the Mississippi River, so a student could find out more information about the topic through many authors as well as get other authors' perspectives about the Mississippi. Often students are provided only one side of an issue, perspective, or topic through a textbook (Zarnowski & Gallagher).

The stimulating and appealing illustrations and photographs in picture books also help maximize students' interest. Nonfiction picture books present information in interesting formats with a great deal of text support from tables, charts, graphs, indexes, and glossaries (Doiron, 1994). The formats found in picture books are appealing to students because it seems real to them (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Doiron; Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). As previously stated, nonfiction reading outside of school consists of newspapers, magazines, the Internet, etc (Angelillo, 2003; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). When students read nonfiction picture books that contain charts, graphs, and glossaries they perceive this type of reading as authentic nonfiction reading; something that adults would read. Furthermore, Gregg and Sekeres (2006) state, "Informational [picture book] text encourages home-school connections because they more closely resemble the topics parents discuss and read with children at home" (p. 109). Informational picture book texts are more relevant to students' lives, so are seen as real life reading as compared to a textbook (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005). Real life reading helps motivate students to read.

When students interact with current and relevant information, their interest levels peak (Myers & Savage, 2005). According to Harvey and Goudvis (2000), "interest is essential to comprehension. If we read things that don't engage us, we probably won't remember much" (p. 46). Engagement when reading can lead to remembering what is read, acquiring knowledge, and enhancing understanding. Picture books top the list of all

literature that lends itself to reading engagement and comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis). When teachers read picture books aloud, they expose students to sophisticated text that requires the students to think. In addition, the illustrations, photographs and text features support readers in their quest to understand the text.

There are unique advantages of using picture books when teachers are delivering instruction (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). According to Allen (2000), “When someone reads to us our minds are free to explore meaning” (p. 44). Additionally, “all students, regardless of age, deserve the opportunity to see the story without struggling with the text” (p. 45). Other researchers agree with these statements. Laminack and Wadsworth (2006a), Pinnell and Scharer (2003), and Trelease (1989) all concur that listening comprehension increases through read-alouds. Many students, especially struggling and reluctant readers, do not know that reading is supposed to make sense (Allen). Through hearing stories read aloud, students are freed from decoding and they can give their full attention to the meaning of the text (Pinnell & Scharer, 2003). “When you read aloud to students, you read the words for them and offer a demonstration of reading with phrasing and fluency” (Pinnell & Scharer, p. 35). According to Trelease (1989), “While students may read and write on different levels, they usually listen on the same level. Reading-aloud time is often the one time when everyone is equal” (p. 61).

Artwork and illustrations have also been noted to help with comprehension. Pictures complement the text to help less proficient readers access meaning (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Villano, 2005). The artwork helps students figure out what something looks like (Hansen, 2001). Research has also shown that using picture books can help strike up classroom conversations (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a; Villano). “The

conversations that occur because of these pictures add a great dimension of understanding to all children' (Villano, p. 125). Villano shares her view that the students' conversations about what is read can bring more pleasure to the experience. Furthermore, Laminack and Wadworth define discussions as "an open interchange of insights" (p. 151), which can lead students to form new questions. These questions can lead to new levels of engagement and understanding.

Picture books are extremely helpful for visual learners (Villano, 2005). Television, computer games, movies, and the Internet have made our society more visually oriented. Many students have become accustomed to learning things visually. Pictures can serve as comprehension aides for these visually astute students. In the primary grades, teachers guide beginning readers to use illustrations to confirm what they are reading. Traditionally, in the intermediate grades, teachers expect older students to discontinue using illustrations to support their reading (Villano). However, "discouraging the use of illustrations in content area reading could be doing a disservice to many students" (Villano, p. 125).

Looking at the research, it is obvious that a student's success depends on processing the material. Using picture books as a read-aloud before reading (pre-reading) the textbook can help scaffold students' understanding (Richardson & Morgan, 2003). When teachers read informational picture books aloud prior to reading a textbook it can help students integrate new information with his or her existing information (Smolkin & Donovan, 2001).

Another potential benefit of using picture books in the classroom is the extent to which it enhances children's gains in vocabulary. According to Richardson and Morgan

(2003), “Word knowledge is one of the most important factors in reading comprehension” (p. 243). The pictures and illustrations may provoke children to generate more connections and meaning, which can “enhance learning and retention of the content” (Elley, 1989, p. 185).

Traditionally, vocabulary has been taught through “rote exercises that require dictionary definitions of extensive numbers of technical and specialized terms” (Richardson & Morgan, 2003, p. 246). In these lessons, teachers often assign 20 to 30 vocabulary words for students to look up and define before reading the text. Richardson and Morgan state these lessons are used in many classrooms despite the fact that this type of vocabulary learning is abstract for students who have limited background knowledge and/or reading and learning disabilities. Students with limited background knowledge and experiences often have a harder time grasping the underlying meaning of many of the vocabulary words. One way teachers can help students with limited background knowledge is to present vocabulary concepts in a very visually concrete manner by using picture books (Richardson & Morgan).

Students come to school with a variety of cultures as well as background experiences. Students who have a broad background will have an easier time learning vocabulary words because of their broad background experiences (Elley, 1989; Richardson & Morgan, 2003; Villano, 2005). These students will be able to connect new knowledge with their prior knowledge and will be able to make more connections. Moreover, students who have narrow background experiences will have a harder time learning vocabulary words because of their limited backgrounds (Elley, 1989; Richardson & Morgan, 2003; Villano, 2005.) Richardson and Morgan shared an example of how

background experiences can help boost vocabulary development and content comprehension. “For instance, those students who have toured historic Philadelphia can relate to a passage about the influence of the Constitution more easily than can those lacking such first hand experience” (p. 246). Villano noted that the students in her study lacked prior knowledge to scaffold new information; therefore it was difficult for the students to learn new concepts. In addition, Goodman (2001) states that a reader’s ability to make sense of written language is directly related to his or her familiarity with the terms presented.

In order to help students build a knowledge base for learning, teachers need to present concepts and terms in a very direct and purposeful way through pictures and visuals (Richardson & Morgan, 2003). Gregg and Sekeres (2006) concur that content area vocabulary can become a stumbling block for many students unless these students have experienced the new words multiple times before reading the text. By reading a picture book aloud that presents some of the same vocabulary words and concepts that will be taught with a textbook, students can begin to acquire some of the content that they will be expected to learn (Villano, 2005).

Two studies conducted by Elley (1989) support the assumption that children can learn new vocabulary words from having illustrated books read aloud to them. In the first experimental study, teachers gave a pretest over key vocabulary words. After the pretest, teachers read picture books aloud to their students without any explanation of vocabulary words. Finally, a posttest was administered to check for vocabulary development. The results of this study showed that the “net gain in words learned, after three readings over 1 week, was between 15 to 20 percent” (Elley, p. 180). In addition, the typical students

learned three more words that were not known before without any explanation from the teacher. Thus, stories read aloud in this way appear to offer a potential for vocabulary acquisition. The second experimental study conducted by Elley (1989) tested the ‘effects of teacher explanation of unfamiliar words, over and above the effects of story reading alone’ (p. 180). This study found that,

Teachers’ additional explanations of unknown words as they are encountered can more than double such vocabulary gains. Furthermore, the evidence from these studies indicates that students who start out with less vocabulary knowledge gain at least as much from the reading as the other students and that the learning is relatively permanent. (p. 184)

There are a few variables that assist with the likelihood that children will learn vocabulary words. These variables include: the frequency of the word’s occurrence in the story, the helpfulness of the context, and the frequency of occurrence of the word in pictorial representation (Elley, 1989). For new knowledge to occur, pictures and verbal context should support the unfamiliar words. In addition, to make the new vocabulary permanent, there should be more than one exposure to each word (Elley, 1989; Richardson & Morgan, 2003). Reading aloud from a variety of picture books can give students exposure to the key vocabulary words that are needed to understand the content area topic. Building vocabulary knowledge through picture books will help students make more connections while reading the content area textbook.

Teachers realize that students enter school with varying degrees of background knowledge and experiences. Laminack and Wadsworth (2006a) believe picture books can help reduce this variance in background knowledge.

Reading aloud from well-chosen picture books actually helps learners build the background understanding necessary to fully appreciate the information presented in most curriculum material. In this way each read-aloud provides layers like the rings of an onion, one around the next. By the end of a unit of study learners are more grounded, having developed a more robust vocabulary to think about and discuss the topic, Learners have a pictorial repertoire to draw from as they try to envision the ideas being discussed. And they have a cache of story to help them make sense of it all. (p. 152)

The power of a well-written picture book cannot be over estimated. There are a variety of necessary instructional practices to keep in mind when using picture books for teaching reading comprehension, vocabulary development, as well as student motivation. It is important to choose the best possible texts for instruction. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) state, “If we aren’t choosing great texts, we might as well give up the idea of teaching with literature” (p. 50). Teachers need to be aware of the high-quality picture books available and how they might choose quality picture books to supplement their curriculum.

How to Select Read Aloud Material

Each year a large number of children’s books roll off the presses (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). “More have been published than ever before, and the books, in

word and art, have never been more engagingly presented' (Fordham, Wellman & Sandmann, 2002, p. 157). With the variety of trade books now available, it is possible to use picture books to study almost every concept in the curriculum (Harvey & Goudvis). Picture books are the most versatile of resources for teaching and learning (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006b). 'They can bring together ideas, images, content, vocabulary, language, and art in the minds of any learner' (Laminack & Wadsworth, p. 208). They can become a bridge to the curriculum by connecting each subject and topic into one 'interconnected entity' (Laminack & Wadsworth, p. 208). Krukjian, Livingston and Cobb (2006) state that picture books serve as a 'springboard' (p. 86) for learning. However, many teachers frequently comment, 'I'd love to use more books as part of my reading instruction, but where do I begin?' (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 52).

According to Trelease (1989) not all books are meant to be read aloud. He also stresses to be selective when choosing books to read aloud to students because some of the books may not be appropriate for classroom consumption. Villano (2005) adds that finding appropriate supplemental material is hard work. So how do teachers know which books are high quality and would be good to use in the classroom?

A significant amount of research has been completed on the criteria for picture book selection. Several researchers have written extensively on selecting children's literature to be read aloud in classrooms (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Billman, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Tiedt, 2000; Wysocki, 2004; Zarnowski & Gallagher,

1993). The following are some of the suggested criteria to consider when choosing picture books to read aloud to students in the content areas. In general, choose picture books for the following reasons:

- Vivid illustrations (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Tiedt, 2000; Wysocki, 2004);
- Story that appeals to students (Billman, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003);
- Absence of stereotypes (Billman, 2002);
- Provide authentic and current information (Billman, 2002);
- Content extends the topic being covered in class (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Billman, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001);
- Topic will stretch existing understanding and will add new insight (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b);
- Clear, rich language with illustrations that reflect the text (Billman, 2002; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Organized and easy to understand (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Quality, well crafted writing (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Intriguing topic (Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Appeal to wide age range (Nespeca & Reeve, 2003)
- Universal appeal (Nespeca & Reeve, 2003);

- Exposure to new writing styles, genres and authors (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Tiedt, 2000; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Stories told from interesting perspectives (Billman, 2002; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993); and
- Graphics enrich the text (Billman, 2002; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993).

In addition, educators should thoughtfully consider the following ideas when choosing picture books to read aloud in the curricular areas: identify concepts that could be developed and/or extended by using that particular book, identify vocabulary words related to the unit of study, identify core understanding needed to connect to the new information, and notice how the writer develops the concepts through the use of illustrations (Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006b). Fountas and Pinnell (2001) also suggest that teachers choose texts that they love, so that his or her enthusiasm will be communicated to the students.

There are many “well-written and tightly focused books available to help layer children’s understanding of most topics in the curriculum” (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006b, p. ix). Laminack and Wadsworth suggest, “there is a connection between well chosen picture books and learning in the content areas” (p. xi). Wysocki (2004) concurs that accurate text and illustrations are perfect for introducing new concepts in the curriculum. Anders and Guzzetti (2005) and Vardell, Hadaway and Young (2006) additionally note that teachers should pick read aloud material to match specific curriculum objectives or on the content they plan to teach. If teachers create instruction around picture books they need to be clear about what they want children to learn from

the experience (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). ‘The clearer we [teachers] are about the instructional focus, the easier it is to match books with our teaching goals’ (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 52).

Researchers suggest that teachers become familiar with the variety of picture books that are available today (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Tiedt, 2000). School and local public libraries are rich resources to explore. Bookstores carry a good selection of children’s books. Tiedt recommends browsing through the picture books to see what the store has to offer. Finally, it is recommended that teachers talk about books with fellow colleagues and other teachers to learn about what picture books have to offer (Harvey & Goudvis; Tiedt). Once teachers have collected books that enhance their library collections, they need to know how to read aloud to their students. Researchers have a few suggestions for teachers that will make read aloud time more effective.

How to Read Aloud

Reading aloud can provide a powerful model for students and can be of great instructional value (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Reading aloud serves, ‘to reassure, to entertain, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, and to inspire our kids’ (Trelease, 1989, p. 4). Trelease believes that literature is the most important medium for providing meaning in students’ lives. Teachers read aloud to immerse students in quality literature as well as to teach specific concepts and strategies (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). The way teachers read aloud to students is just as important as selecting quality books to read aloud. Reading aloud is more than simply standing in front of a group of students and reading the words on the pages (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a). According to Laminack and Wadsworth,

When a read-aloud is done well, it is a performance, an art very akin to storytelling. The telling is as crucial to the listener as is the tale. If the tale is well crafted, intriguing, captivating even, [comma added] but the telling is monotone and dull, we fail to create a current strong enough to sweep listeners away- to pull them into the flow of the story. There will be no magic. (p. 4)

A teacher's voice can be the magic that draws students into books and reading (Laminack & Wadsworth). In order for students to be *swept away* by read aloud stories, teachers need to pay close attention to the way they are presenting read aloud material.

Many researchers have recommendations for reading aloud (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Pike & Mumper, 2004; Trelease, 1989; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993). Some general suggestions for making read-aloud sessions enjoyable and educational are:

- Be sure students are seated comfortably and can hear the story (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001);
- Be sure to hold the book so everyone can see the illustrations (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Trelease, 1989);
- Establish a purpose for reading by telling students why the book was selected (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001);

- Activate prior knowledge by looking at the cover of the book and reading the title and author aloud to students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b);
- Take a picture walk through the pages of the book to examine the illustrations and encourage students to make connections to anything they see in the book (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b);
- Show the pictures while reading (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b);
- Be sure to read slow enough for students to build mental pictures (Trelease, 1989; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993);
- Model fluency by paying close attention to pace, tone, inflection and rhythm (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Pike & Mumper, 2004; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b);
- Add expression (Pike & Mumper, 2004); and
- Clarify vocabulary words (Nespeca & Reeve, 2003).

In addition, educators should consider reading a book aloud more than one time. Laminack and Wadsworth (2006a) suggest reading the book aloud at least two times. During the initial reading, teachers should have students listen for big ideas that maybe presented in the story. Teachers should not stop to discuss or add any explanations during the initial reading of a book. Nespeca and Reeves (2003) agree that questions and comments should be kept to a minimum during the first reading. Resisting long discussions during the first reading allows the listeners to absorb and process the information that is presented in the book (Pike

& Mumper, 2003; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993). During the second or consecutive readings, researchers encourage interactive read alouds. Teachers may stop to solicit ideas from students, pose questions and discuss the big ideas of the story (Laminack & Wadsworth). If teachers approach most read alouds in this manner, students will be able to use the context of the language to make meaning as they are engaged as listeners (Laminack & Wadsworth).

The process of reading aloud is vitally important to students' enjoyment and education. Teachers need to be aware of their purpose for reading aloud and how they are reading aloud to students. When teachers attend to the previously stated suggestions for making read alouds enjoyable for students, they "can make the read-aloud experience a magic one for students" (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, p. 5).

Conclusion

Reading aloud in the curricular content areas can yield important academic benefits for children. As demonstrated through the research on textbooks and picture books usage, reading picture books aloud provides a wonderful opportunity to promote students' comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and motivation. Lane and Wright (2007) suggest that reading picture books aloud can "lead to a positive attitude towards reading and can serve to motivate children to engage in other literacy activities on their own. Reading aloud to children can be a very powerful way to increase vocabulary, [and] listening comprehension" (p. 674).

Picture book read alouds are recommended for all age levels (Trelease, 1989). Picture books can help teachers supplement the curriculum by providing visually stimulating illustrations for student that are also supported by enriching text. Utilizing picture books in the curriculum can enhance students' reading experiences and achievement. Teachers can maximize student success by reading picture books aloud.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

For the past nine years, fourth grade students at my school have received failing scores in the content area of social studies. It became apparent that these students needed another way to improve their comprehension and understanding of content area material other than just reading a textbook. Thus, I began searching for ways to help these intermediate grade students find success in social studies. One suggested way to help students understand content area material is to use picture books to supplement the social studies textbook and curriculum.

The following research study sought to examine the impact and effects of using picture books as a supplemental tool to a social studies curriculum. The study investigated a connection between well choose picture books and learning in the content area. The primary research question guiding this project was: Does the use of picture books during pre-reading activities improve students' reading comprehension of grade level content area textbooks? There were two secondary questions that stemmed from this primary question, and they are as follows:

1. Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase the students' understanding of vocabulary words when reading the content area textbook?
2. Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase students' interest in the content area textbook?

Setting

This study took place in a fourth grade classroom at a public elementary school in a middle-sized school district in Midwest rural community with a student population of approximately 325 students in grades kindergarten through sixth. The fourth grade classroom in which the research was conducted was made up of twelve girls and thirteen boys. All twenty-five students were from white middle class rural families. Data collection was completed during the 2006-2007 school year.

Participants

Letters of invitation and consent forms to participate in my research project were sent to all twenty-five fourth grade students. Eight consent forms were returned to my building principal.

One fourth grade teacher and eight fourth grade children, ages nine to ten years old, who attended elementary school in a middle size school district in northeast Iowa were the subjects of this study. The participants included four students who performed above grade level (two male and two female), one student who performed at grade level (male), and three students who performed below grade level (two male and one female) based on district assessments. Parents of these students gave permission for their child to be interviewed and observed for this study. All participants were volunteers and no compensation in the form of money, gifts, or academic credit was provided for the participants' time. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time and would not be penalized. Individual responses were kept anonymous and confidential.

Procedures

During the month of September, the classroom teacher taught a social studies unit, *Regions of the United States*, using only the content area textbook. Throughout the months of October and November, the classroom teacher used the content area textbook to teach the unit, *Middle West*. The students took an end-of-unit test at the completion of each of the previously stated units when only the content area textbook was used.

In November, I met with the fourth grade teacher to show her how to use picture books as a supplemental resource for the next social studies unit. She used the picture books as a pre-reading activity to aide in improving students' reading comprehension of their grade level social studies textbook. In the months of December 2006 through the end of January 2007, the classroom teacher implemented the use of picture books along with the content area textbook to teach the unit, *Iowa Studies*. The students took an end-of-unit test at the completion of the Iowa Studies unit where picture books and the textbook were both utilized.

Introducing Picture Books. I met with the classroom teacher to discuss how to use picture books as a pre-reading activity in her classroom. We discussed that she would read the picture books aloud to the students before they read the textbook. I collected picture books that discussed the key concepts of the fourth grade unit, *Iowa Studies*. When the classroom teacher presented information about glaciers, she read picture books about glaciers and ice aloud to the class before the students read about glaciers in their textbook. This was a whole group presentation where the teacher read the books aloud while showing the pictures. The teacher put the picture books on display around the classroom for students to look at and explore after she read them

aloud. A list of picture books that were used during the Iowa Studies unit can be found in the reference section.

Observations. The classroom teacher used her regular data collection and her own observations to keep track of her students' engagement with each unit and class discussion. Regular data collection and observations means that the classroom teacher observed her own students in her classroom as part of her regular data collection process. She was urged to carry on her teaching exactly as she would have done if no experiment were under way. The classroom teacher observed the students' involvement and engagement during each social studies unit. She took notes on the students' reactions and involvement with the units as well as kept a grade book for all assignments.

Student Interest Surveys. After each of the three social studies units, the participating students completed an interest survey. These surveys were conducted to investigate students' interest, motivation, comprehension, and vocabulary development from each of the social studies unit. Questions focused on the key concepts of each unit, what the students liked about the unit, as well as how the students felt as they read that specific social studies unit.

Thought-Bubbles. In addition to the student interest survey, students had to complete a blank thought-bubble picture (Zambo, 2006). The pictures consisted of a boy or girl reading a social studies textbook. Students had to draw what he (or she) looked like as he (or she) read and what went on in his (or her) head as the reading occurred. The interest surveys and thought-bubble pictures are included in Appendix A.

Student Interviews. Student interviews were conducted at the end of each social studies unit. A tape recorder was used to accurately record the results of the interviews. The tapes were then used to transcribe the students' responses to the questions so the data could be analyzed. Students were asked questions about what they learned in social studies, how they felt when reading the textbook, and if the use of picture books increased their vocabulary knowledge or their comprehension of the social studies material. Student interview questions are included in Appendix B.

Teacher Interview. The classroom teacher interview was conducted after all three social studies units were presented. A tape recorder was used to accurately record the results of the interview. The tapes were then used to transcribe the teachers' responses to the questions so the data could be analyzed. The classroom teacher answered questions pertaining to student engagement during social studies units where only the textbook was used as well as student engagement during the social studies unit where picture books were used in addition to the textbook. The classroom teacher's interview questions are included in Appendix C.

Unit Tests. After each social studies unit, students completed an end-of-unit comprehensive test. These tests included questions pertaining to the key concepts taught in that social studies unit.

Data Analysis

This study combined multiple methods of data collection to achieve a deeper understanding of the participants and to increase the validity of the findings. Methods of teacher data collection included a teacher interview. Methods of student data collection included the classroom teacher's observations about the students, students'

interest surveys, thought-bubbles pictures, interviews, and unit test scores. The student interviews, thought-bubble pictures, and surveys were analyzed in order to look for recurring themes. Key vocabulary words were tabulated from each student interview and survey in order to determine whether there was a correlation between the use of picture books as a pre-reading activity and vocabulary development. Thought-bubble pictures were analyzed in order to look for a link between students' feelings towards reading a textbook when picture books were used as a supplemental activity. Finally, the students' end-of-unit test scores were analyzed to determine whether there was a correlation between the use of picture books as a pre-reading activity and content area comprehension.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This section will present findings from the analyses of the students' end-of-unit tests, teacher and student interviews, student interest surveys and thought-bubbles to determine whether reading picture books aloud can improve students' reading comprehension of grade level content area textbooks, as well as increase students' vocabulary knowledge and interests in content area curriculum. This section is structured around my primary research question and my two secondary research questions. My primary research question was: Does the use of picture books during pre-reading activities improve students' reading comprehension of grade level content area textbooks? My two secondary research questions were:

- Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase the students' understanding of vocabulary words when reading the content area textbook?
- Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase students' interest in the content area textbook?

Comprehension. The overarching question guiding this research project was: Does the use of picture books during pre-reading improve reading comprehension of grade level content area textbooks? In order to determine the answer to this questions, I looked at the participating students' tests scores from each unit test as well as the students' and the classroom teacher's interviews.

Students completed an end-of-unit test after each social studies unit. Classroom instruction for the first two units was provided through the content area textbook only.

Students learned and studied about *Regions of the United States* and *The Middle West* by only reading their content area textbook. During the third social studies unit, *Iowa Studies*, the classroom teacher chose picture books that discussed key ideas from the unit to read aloud to the class. The teacher read these picture books aloud to the class before the students read their content area textbook. Students learned and studied about Iowa through the use of picture books and their content area textbook. The following table presents the students' ability levels, test points, as well as their test percentages.

Table 1: 4th Grade Social Studies Unit Test

Student & Gender	Level	Test 1 43 pts	Test 1 %	Test 2 70 pts.	Test 2 %	Test 3 100 pts.	Test 3 %
1 (M)	High	41	95	70	100	92	92
2 (M)	High	41	95	70	100	93	93
5 (F)	High	42	98	66	92	94	94
6 (F)	High	41	95	70	100	96	96
7 (M)	Middle	36	84	52	74	77	77
3 (M)	Low	24	56	42	60	74	74
4 (M)	Low	27	63	44	63	82	82
8 (F)	Low	15	35	34	49	87	87

Test 1: Regions of the United States—content text only, without picture books of content

Test 2; The Middle West—content text only, without picture books of content

Test 3: Iowa Studies—content text and picture books of content

Students who normally perform below grade level performed better on the end-of-unit tests where picture books were used as a pre-reading activity to supplement the content area textbook. The students who perform below grade level increased their end-of-unit test percentages when picture books were used to supplement the textbook.

Table 2 summarizes each of the students' percentage performances on the three unit tests.

Table 2: 4th Grade Social Studies Unit Test Comparisons

Student & Gender	Level	Test 1 percent	Test 2 Percent	Test 3 Percent
1 (M)	High	95%	100%	92%
2 (M)	High	95%	100%	93%
3 (M)	Low	56%	60%	74%
4 (M)	Low	63%	63%	82%
5 (F)	High	98%	92%	94%
6 (F)	High	95%	100%	96%
7 (M)	Middle	84%	74%	77%
8 (F)	Low	35%	49%	87%

An SPSS T-test analysis of the low students' scores before and after picture book instruction did not provide a significant difference due to the small number of subjects. However, there was a large difference in their mean scores between the first two tests prior to the picture book instruction (mean of 54%) and the final test after the use of picture book instruction (mean of 81%). This 27% difference shows improvement in the students' responses to the text read using picture books during instruction to help inform them of the content.

The use of picture books as a pre-reading activity did not seem to have a significant effect on the students who perform at or above grade level due to the small number of subjects. In addition, since higher achieving students' scores were already extremely high, any improvement was difficult to discern. Three of these high achieving students received 100% on their second unit test. These students can not receive a higher percent, so there may be a tendency that their scores may drop just a bit due to the ceiling effect of not being able to exceed the previous score. These students were already performing quite well in social studies. Moreover, listening to picture books read aloud did not have a negative effect in their comprehension.

At the completion of the three social studies units the eight participating students were interviewed and asked to give their reactions to certain aspects of the study. Each student was interviewed one to one with the researcher. The interviews were carried out in the researchers classroom during lunch hour. One of the student interview questions was, 'Do you feel that the use of picture books increased your comprehension of the social studies material? Why or why not?' The following answers to this question were received.

Student 1: Yes, because I got to see some of it. Because a lot of stuff in the social studies book doesn't show us, it just tells us things.

Student 2: Kind of. Because picture books showed us how it [glaciers] could have shaped the land and how it wore away rock and turned it into sand.

Student 3: They [picture books] helped me understand Iowa Studies because they gave me more pictures and showed us where the glaciers formed.

Student 4: Yeah. The pictures helped me understand stuff. I can understand words better in social studies when I can see a picture.

Student 5: A little bit. The textbook didn't have answers to questions that I had, and the picture books helped.

Student 6: Yeah. The pictures in the picture books helped me see things that we were reading about in our social studies textbook.

Student 7: Yes. I really paid attention to it because we had to do a scrapbook and I thought the books would be helpful. The pictures helped too.

Student 8: Yes, because you can think about more stuff to write and learn about.

All eight students felt that picture books enhanced their understanding of the social studies content. The main reason students thought picture books increased their understanding of the social studies material was because the picture books provided pictures. The pictures provided a visual to go along with the content they were studying which helped the students understand the concepts more clearly.

The classroom teacher was also interviewed at the completion of all three social studies units. The teacher interview consisted of the researcher and the teacher. The interview was conducted after school in the participating teacher's classroom. She was asked to give her reactions to certain aspects of the study. One of her interview questions was: "Do you feel that the use of picture books enhanced the students comprehension of the content area material?" The classroom teacher responded by stating, "Definitely! The one [picture book] that comes to mind is the glacier picture book with all the pictures of the glaciers so they [students] could actually see what they [glaciers] looked like." The classroom teacher was also asked another question pertaining to student comprehension when picture books were used. The second question was, "Did your students receive better grades in social studies when picture books were used?" She answered with an astounding, "Yes!"

The students' test scores and student and teacher interviews show that the use of picture books as a pre-reading activity can increase students' comprehension of content area material. Picture books allow students to actually see images and photographs of key concepts or ideas that allow them to better understand the social studies material.

Vocabulary. A secondary question that stemmed from my primary research question was: Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase the students' understanding of vocabulary words when reading the content area textbook? In order to determine the answer to this question I triangulated the data. I looked at the participating students surveys, student interviews, as well as the interview of the classroom teacher.

In order to ascertain if the use of picture books during pre-reading increases students understanding of vocabulary words when reading the content area textbook, I tabulated the number of times the students used key vocabulary words in their end-of-unit surveys as well as in their interviews. I reviewed the students' surveys and counted how many key words each student used in his or her responses. The key vocabulary words were determined by the key ideas for each unit. Surveys number one and two were over social studies units where only the textbook was utilized in the classroom. Survey number three was over the *Iowa Studies Unit* where the teacher used picture books as a pre-reading activity before reading from the textbook. The data for the vocabulary words used in each student survey, as well as the total vocabulary words used in all three surveys is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Number of Vocabulary Words Recorded in Surveys

Student & Gender	Level	Survey #1	Survey #2	Survey #3	Total
1 (M)	High	2	7	7	16
2 (M)	High	3	19	9	31
3 (M)	Low	3	2	2	7
4 (M)	Low	1	6	1	8
5 (F)	High	18	6	10	34
6 (F)	High	4	3	5	12
7 (M)	Middle	5	3	3	11
8 (F)	Low	0	2	2	4

The results in Table 3 show that higher and middle achieving students used more total vocabulary words over all three units than did the students who are lower achieving students. Students who are low-level learners recorded vocabulary words in the single digits, where as the middle and higher academic students reached the double digits. The total vocabulary words used for all three-unit surveys ranged from four to thirty-four words.

The use of picture books as a pre-reading activity in unit three did not seem to affect the number of vocabulary words students used in their survey reflections. In fact, in some cases, the number of vocabulary words used decreased after each survey. However, three out of eight students increased their vocabulary words from the first survey to the third survey. Out of these three students, two of the students were high achieving students and the third child was a lower achieving student.

Student interviews were also analysed to determine if the use of picture books increased students' vocabulary understanding and usage. Students were asked two vocabulary related questions during their interviews. The first question was: "What are some things you learned this year in social studies?" Students gave the following responses.

Student 1: Iowa farming is important to Iowa. It has fertile soil. I also learned about states and capitals in the Middle West and Northeast.

Student 2: I learned about how glaciers form the land, states and capitals. I learned some about landforms, like great lakes, harbors, bays, and mountains.

Student 3: I learned a lot of things in the Middle West, Northeast, Regions, and old days in Massachusetts.

Student 4: I learned how we could use maps and use them to find places, rocky places, and flat land.

Student 5: We learned about landforms and different things that can form on that.

Student 6: In Iowa History we learned about the Underground Railroad, and Harriet Tubman escaping. We also learned about towns in Iowa. In the unit on the Northeast, we learned about the Appalachian Mountains and the Mid-Atlantic states.

Student 7: Environment, suburbs, urban, and rural. Revolutionary War.

Student 8: Iowa. We had to learn about all kinds of people and things.

Table 4 summarizes the students' answers by tabulating the number of times the students used key vocabulary words during the first interview question.

Table 4: Number of vocabulary words recorded during student interview question 1

Student & Gender	Level	# Of Vocabulary Words
1 (M)	High	6
2 (M)	High	9
3 (M)	Low	4
4 (M)	Low	3
5 (F)	High	1
6 (F)	High	5
7 (M)	Middle	5
8 (F)	Low	1

The total number of key vocabulary words used in the student interviews ranged from one word to nine words, with the majority of the students using four or more words.

The data received from the student surveys and the first interview question does not show whether or not the students actually understand the key vocabulary words meanings. All this data shows is that students remembered what the key ideas studied in each unit were.

The second student interview question that pertained to vocabulary knowledge or understanding was: "Did the picture books help you understand what some of the key vocabulary words meant? If so, how?" The students gave the following responses:

Student 1: not really.

Student 2: no

Student 3: Yes, there were lots of pictures to help you know what will happen in the book.

Student 4: Yes, so you could see what they were actually doing.

Student 5: A little bit. I learned different words for other words from the textbook.

Student 6: Yeah. She [teacher] would tell you what it [a word] meant and when you keep on reading you would find out.

Student 7: Yes. At first I didn't know what things were, the pictures helped me see what it looked like.

Student 8: Yes: Words went with the pictures and they helped me spell words for my scrapbook.

Five out of eight students felt that the use of picture books increased their understanding of key vocabulary words when reading their content area textbook. These same five students felt that the pictures aided in their understanding of the vocabulary words because the pictures helped them see what things looked like. The two students who did not feel the picture books helped their understanding of key vocabulary words were already achieving high scores in social studies and in other content areas.

Finally, the classroom teacher was interviewed to give her reactions to the vocabulary aspects of the study. The teacher was asked, "Do you feel that the use of picture books increased the students' understanding of key vocabulary words used in the content area textbook?" The classroom teacher responded by stating, "I think the students had a better understanding of the vocabulary words. The kids got more in to it [picture books], too. They were excited to see things in their textbooks that we read about in the picture books." She also added, "I liked using the picture books because it is a simpler form that gives students more exposure to what things look like or what words mean. For visual learners, it is much better for them."

The classroom teacher and many of the participating students felt that the use of picture books as a pre-reading activity increased their understanding of key vocabulary words and concepts when reading the content area textbook. They believe that the picture book illustrations and images helped their understanding by allowing them to actually see what things look like while they read about the content.

Interest. My final question that stemmed from my primary research question was, “Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase students’ interest in the content area textbook?” To determine the answer to this question, I looked at the participating student surveys, student thought-bubble sheets, as well as the interview of the classroom teacher.

All three social studies unit surveys started out the with the same question, “Was the unit interesting to you?” Why or why not? The following are the students’ written answers for the first unit, *Studying Regions*, where only the textbook was used.

Student 1: Yes and no because some of the stuff I already knew.

Student 2: Yes! I thought it was cool because it is amazing how one place can be so different from another.

Student 3: Yes because we learned about different regions around the world.

Student 4: Yes because it is a fun unit.

Student 5: Yes, because I didn’t know about elevation, economy, conservation, fertile soil, different plains, customs, cultures, or latitude or longitude.

Student 6: Yes. It was interesting because I like a lot of other regions and I wanted to learn more about them.

Student 7: No. It was a boring unit..

Student 8: Yes. It was interesting because we learned about saying hello in different ways.

Next are the students' answers to the same question, "Was the unit interesting to you?"

Why or why not?" for the unit, *The Middle West*, where only the textbook was utilized.

Student 1: Yes because we live in the Middle West, and it is cool to learn about where you live.

Student 2: Yes because I learned that Kansas was called the breadbasket of the Middle West. I also learned about the Great Lakes and the states and capitals.

Student 3: Yes, because you learn new things.

Student 4: Yes because it was fun learning the states and capitals.

Student 5: Yes, it was interesting to be because we get to learn about the regions we live in.

Student 6: Yes, because I learned some things I didn't know.

Student 7: No. It was a boring unit.

Student 8: Yes, It was interesting an cool.

The following are the students' answers to the same question, "Was the unit interesting to you?" Why or why not?" for the unit, *Iowa Studies*, where the teacher used picture books as a pre-reading activity to supplement the content area textbook.

Student 1: Yes, because I learned a lot about Iowa.

Student 2: Yes, because we learned about our states' past and its present.

Student 3: I liked it because it was easy.

Student 4: Yes, because it was a fun unit.

Student 5: Yes it was interesting because I got to learn more about Iowa.

Student 6: Yes, because I wanted to learn about the Underground

Railroad.

Student 7: Yes, because it was interesting to learn about Iowa.

Student 8: It was okay because it was fun to study Iowa.

Overall, students found all three social studies units interesting. Student seven thought the first two social studies units were boring, but found the third unit interesting. It is undetermined whether this student thought the third unit was interesting because the picture books added to his understanding or because he found studying Iowa fascinating. Further analysis is needed.

After each social studies unit, I asked the students to complete a blank thought-bubble picture (Zambo, 2006). The pictures consisted of a boy or girl reading a social studies textbook. Students had to draw what he (or she) looked like as he (or she) read and what went on in his (or her) head as the reading occurred. The following tables (Tables 5-7) summarize the students' thought-bubble pictures.

Table 5: Thought-Bubble Picture Unit I Summaries: Studying Regions

Student	Level	Facial Expression on the girl or boy	Thought-bubble Thought
1	High	Straight-line Mouth	This is okay
2	High	Open mouth	This is interesting
3	Low	Happy Face	Nature
4	Low	Happy Face	This is just right
5	High	Happy Face	It is cool that you can find an exact place on earth with latitude and longitude
6	High	Straight-line Mouth	I don't really care, but I like it.
7	Middle	Sad Face	This is boring
8	Low	Happy Face	Blank Bubble

Table 6: Thought-Bubble Picture Unit 2 Summaries: Middle West

Student	Level	Facial Expression on the girl or boy	Thought-bubble Thought
1	High	Straight-line Mouth	This is interesting but I would rather be at P.E. or recess.
2	High	Open Mouth	This is astonishing. I never thought that was possible.
3	Low	Straight-line Mouth	I don't really care either way.
4	Low	Straight-line Mouth	It was frustrating because it was a little hard.
5	High	Happy Face	This is cool. I didn't know that.
6	High	Happy Face	This is cool!!
7	Middle	Straight-line Mouth	This is kind of interesting.
8	Low	Happy Face	It was fun and cool

Table 7: Thought-Bubble Picture Unit 3 Summaries: Iowa Studies

Student	Level	Facial Expression on the girl or boy	Thought-bubble Thought
1	High	Happy Face	This is really interesting and cool.
2	High	Open Mouth	Iowa used to be covered under water.
3	Low	Happy Face	I really like Iowa.
4	Low	Happy Face	I liked reading the Iowa Studies books.
5	High	Happy Face	I didn't know that Iowa's State Tree is the Oak tree.
6	High	Straight-line Mouth	In some parts it is okay.
7	Middle	Happy Face	This is interesting.
8	Low	Happy Face	This is a cool book.

The illustrated facial expressions on the thought-bubble pictures indicate that many of the students enjoyed reading their social studies textbooks. Enjoyment was expressed in their drawings through the use of a happy face or through the use of an open-mouthed face indicating surprise and representing incidents where the students found the information interesting or exciting. In the first unit where only the textbook was used for the students' learning, three students drew sad or straight-line mouths on the faces. It was concluded by the researcher that these students found the textbook to be boring or hard to read. The other four students drew happy faces. The researcher concluded that this indicated these four students enjoyed reading the textbook.

The textbook was utilized again in the second unit. Four out of the eight students drew a straight-line mouth for their feelings when reading the textbook during this unit. These four students thought that some of the information was interesting but would rather be doing something else.

During the third and final unit, the classroom teacher read picture books aloud to the students before reading the textbook. Seven out of eight students drew a happy face on their thought-bubble characters, which the researcher concluded was an indication that they enjoyed reading the textbook after having the picture books read to them, first. The student, who did not draw a happy face, drew a straight face and wrote that some of the parts were okay for learning. The thought-bubble data shows that students were more interested in the content area textbook when picture books were read aloud to them during a pre-reading activity.

Student number two consistently drew his thought-bubble character with an open mouth which illustrated how excited and interested he was in the subject he was reading.

Student number four seemed to focus his thought-bubble character's thoughts on how easy or difficult the text was for him to read. His comments when reading the content area textbook were, "This is just right" and "It was frustrating because it was a little hard." These comments suggest that the text he was reading was either just right for his reading ability or too hard for him. In the *Iowa Studies* unit where the teacher read picture books aloud to the class, student number four's thought-bubble indicated that he enjoyed learning through picture books. Student four stated, "I liked reading the *Iowa Studies* books."

Student number seven's thought-bubble pictures and thoughts changed with each unit. The first thought-bubble picture consisted of a sad face with a "This is boring" comment in his thought-bubble. The second unit thought-bubble picture had a straight face with a "this is kind of interesting" comment in the thought-bubble. Finally, the third unit thought-bubble picture had a boy with a smiling face with the comment "This is interesting" in the thought-bubble. The use of picture books as a pre-reading activity helped increase this student's interest in the content area textbook.

At the conclusion of this study, I asked the classroom teacher about her perceptions on student engagement and interests during the social studies units. The first question was: "How engaged were the students during the social studies units where only the textbook was used?" The following answer was received. "The majority listened very well. Some of the Title I kids did not." The second question was: "How engaged

were the students during the social studies unit on Iowa Studies where you used picture books as a pre-reading activity?"The teacher responded by stating, "They [students] did like that better; honestly and truthfully. I am not just saying this for your project."The classroom teacher felt that the use of picture books as a pre-reading activity did in fact increase students' interest in the content area textbook. This is consistent with the data collected through the student surveys and thought-bubble pictures. Students also felt that the use of picture books as a pre-reading activity increased their interest in the content area textbook.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section will discuss my conclusions drawn by analyzing the data from the students' end-of-unit tests, teacher and student interviews, student interest surveys, and student thought-bubble sheets. I will conclude whether reading picture books aloud can improve student reading comprehension of grade level content area textbooks, as well as increase student vocabulary knowledge and interests in content area curriculum. This section is again structured around my primary research question and my two secondary research questions. My primary research question was: Does the use of picture books during pre-reading activities improve students' reading comprehension of grade level content area textbooks? My two secondary research questions were:

- Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase the students' understanding of vocabulary words when reading the content area textbook?
- Does the use of picture books during pre-reading increase students' interest in the content area textbook?

Comprehension Conclusions. Analysis of the students' tests scores and student and teacher interviews conducted in this research project confirm that using picture books as a pre-reading activity does in fact increase comprehension of grade level content area textbooks. One major finding of this research is that using picture books as a pre-reading activity enhances lower level achieving students more than the higher achieving students. The lower level students received failing scores on the first two unit tests where only the content area textbook was used. When the teacher read picture

books aloud to the class before reading the textbook, the lower level students increased their end-of-unit test scores by as much as 38 percent. In some cases, these students went from a failing grade to passing. Additionally, reading picture books aloud also increased test performances for all students who performed at grade level. At this time no significant gains were recorded for students who performed above grade level. These students received high grades on all three unit tests. These students already go beyond the specified academic knowledge for this current grade level, and could not receive a higher percentage on their unit tests.

The students, along with the classroom teacher, felt that the main reasons for the increase in understanding of the content area curriculum were the illustrations and photographs in the picture books. The pictures complemented the text to help the students gain meaning. The art work in picture books helped the students get a concrete visualization of what something looks like. Our society's very visually oriented. Many students have become accustomed to learning things visually, so it makes sense to use as much visual stimulation in the classroom as possible to stimulate learning. In addition, the students were able to apply their new visual knowledge gained by listening to picture books read aloud to their own reading of the content area textbook.

Vocabulary Conclusions. The student and teacher interview results and the student surveys appear to back up the previous research findings that show the connection between reading picture books aloud and the increase of vocabulary knowledge (Elley, 1989; Goodman, 2001; Richardson & Morgan, 2003; Villano, 2005). Of the eight students interviewed, five of them felt that the use of picture books increased their understanding of key vocabulary words when reading their content area

textbook. This leads to the conclusion that the pictures helped the students' understand the vocabulary words. In addition, the classroom teacher concluded that the students had a better understanding of the key vocabulary words when picture books were used as a pre-reading activity over when picture books were not utilized.

The use of picture books as a pre-reading activity increased student understanding of key vocabulary words and concepts by building background knowledge before reading the content area textbook. The picture book illustrations and images helped build the students' understanding by giving them a pictorial representation to draw new knowledge from.

Interest Conclusions. Examination of the data conducted in this aspect of the research project show that using picture books as a pre-reading activity does increase students' interest in the content area textbook. Students who were not very interested in the content area textbook during the first two units became more interested in the subject matter when the teacher read picture books aloud. Seven out of the eight students illustrated their thought-bubble character with a happy face, indicating that they enjoyed reading the textbook after having the picture books read to them first. The data provides evidence that when students are exposed to picture book read alouds before reading their content area textbook, their interest in the content area textbook increases.

The teacher's analysis of the students' interest was consistent with the data gathered in other ways in this research project. The classroom teacher recognized that the students, especially the Title I students, were not as engaged or interested in class discussions when she only used the textbooks for instruction. When she read the

picture books aloud to the class, the students became more interested and engaged with the discussions.

Throughout the literature, researchers maintained that reading picture books aloud to children could increase students' comprehension, vocabulary development, and interest in content area material (Allen, 2000; Anders & Guzzetti, 2005; Carr, Buchanan, Wentz, Weiss & Brant, 2001; Fordham, Wellman & Sandmann, 2002; Gregg & Sekeres, 2006; Hansen, 2001; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Kurkjian, Livingston & Cobb, 2006; Laminack & Wadsworth, 2006a, 2006b; Nespeca & Reeve, 2003; Tiedt, 2000; Trelease, 1989; Villano, 2005; Wysocki, 2004; Zarnowski & Gallagher, 1993). As a result of the research I conducted in a fourth grade classroom it is my conclusion that when a teacher uses picture books as a pre-reading activity, student understanding, vocabulary knowledge, and interest in content material increases.

Limitations

This study only focused on eight fourth grade students, four of which were academically performing above grade level. Such a small sampling may or may not report results that would parallel results completed with a larger group of children.

Recommendations

The vocabulary knowledge examined in this study focused more on the students' use of key vocabulary in post reading activities rather than in their understanding of they key vocabulary. While the students were able to use key vocabulary in their responses to questions, and while the classroom teacher felt the use of picture books helped children understand they vocabulary better, there was no clare connection between picture books, key vocabulary present in the text and students' knowledge of

that key vocabulary. It would be beneficial to have students define key vocabulary words before and after hearing picture books read aloud. In addition, a teacher could tabulate the number of times the key vocabulary words were used within a picture book text to determine if exposure to a word enhances vocabulary development. In addition, it is recommended that a larger group of teachers and students be studied for a longer time period. By increasing both the number of participants and the amount of time engaged in the use of picture books, the possible effects suggested in this initial smaller study may be more clearly documented.

References

- Abadiano, H.R. & Turner, J. (2002). Reading expository text: The challenges of students with learning disabilities. *The NERA Journal*, 38(2), 49-55.
- Allen, J. (2000). *Yellow brick roads: Shared and guided paths to independent reading, 4-12*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Allington, R. (2002). You can't learn much from books you can't read. *Educational Leadership*, 60(3), 16-19.
- Anders, P.L., & Guzzetti, B.J. (2005). *Literacy instruction in the content areas*. (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Angelillo, J. (2003). *Writing about reading from book talk to literacy essays, grades 3-8*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Bader, B. (1976). *American picturebooks from Noah's ark to the Beast within*. New York: Macmillan.
- Biancarosa, G. (2005). After third grade. *Educational Leadership*, 63(2), 16-22.
- Billman, L.W. (2002). Aren't these books for little kids? *Educational Leadership*, 60(3), 48-51.
- Budiansky, S. (2001). The trouble with textbooks. *Prism*, 10(6), 24-27.
- Chall, J.S., & Conard, S.S. (1991). *Should textbooks challenge students?* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Carr, K.S., Buchanan, D.L., Wentz, J.B., Weiss, J.L., & Brant, K.L. (2001). Not just for primary grades: A bibliography of picture books for secondary content teachers. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 45(2), 146-153.

- Duke, N.K. (2003). Beyond once upon a time: Informational text read alouds help boost comprehension-the key is talking about the text. *Instructor*, 113(4), 23-26.
- Doiron, R. (1994). Using nonfiction in a read-aloud program: Letting the facts speak for themselves. *The Reading Teacher*, 47(8). 616-623.
- Dunn, M.A. (2000). Closing the book on social studies: Four classroom teachers go beyond the text. *The Social Studies*, 91, 132-139.
- Elley, W.B. (1989). Vocabulary acquisition from listening to stories. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 24(2), 174-187.
- Fordham, N.W., Wellman, D., & Sandmann, A. (2002). Taming the text: Engaging and supporting students in social studies reading. *The Social Studies*, 93(4), 149-158.
- Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (2001). *Guiding readers and writers, grades 3-6*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Goodman, K. (2001). *On reading: A common sense look at the nature of language and the science of reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gregg, M., & Sekeres, D.C. (2006). Supporting children's reading of expository text in the geography classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(2), 102-110.
- Hansen, J. (2001). *When writers read* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2000). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension to enhance understanding*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Kurkjian, C., Livingston, N., & Cobb, V. (2006). Inquiring minds want to learn: The info on nonfiction and informational series books. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(1), 86-96.

- Laminack, L.L., & Wadsworth, R.M. (2006a). *Learning under the influence of language and literature: Making the most of read-alouds across the day*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Laminack, L.L., & Wadsworth, R.M. (2006b). *Reading aloud across the curriculum: How to build bridges in language arts, math, science, and social studies*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Lane, H.B., & Wright, T.L. (2007). Maximizing the effectiveness of reading aloud. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(7), 668-675.
- McKenna, M.C., & Robinson, R.D. (2006). *Teaching through text: Reading and writing in the content areas*. (4th ed.). New York: Pearson Education.
- Montali, J., & Lewandowski, L. (1996). Bimodal reading: Benefits of a talking computer for average and less average readers. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 29(3), 271-279.
- Myers, M.P., & Savage, T. (2005). Enhancing student comprehension of social studies material. *The Social Studies*, 96(1), 18-23.
- National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2004). *2004 long trend assessment results in reading*. Retrieved February 6, 2006, from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ltt>
- National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2005). *2005 assessment results in reading*. Retrieved February 6, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nrc/reading_math_2005/s0002.asp?printver
- Nespeca, S.M., & Reeve, J.B. (2003). *Picture books plus: 100 extension activities in art, drama, music, math, and science*. Chicago: American Library Association.

- Neufeld, P. (2005). Comprehension instruction in content area classes. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(4), 302-312.
- Passe, J. (2006, September/October). New challenges in elementary social studies. *The Social Studies*, 189-192.
- Pike, K., & Mumper, J. (2004). *Making nonfiction and other informational texts come alive: A practical approach to reading, writing, and using nonfiction and other informational texts across the curriculum*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Pinnell, G.S., & Scharer, P.L. (2003). *Teaching for comprehension in reading grades K-2*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books.
- Richardson, J.S., & Morgan, R.F. (2003). *Reading to learn in the content areas*. (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Ryder, R.J., & Graves, M.F. (2003). *Reading and learning in content areas* (3rd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Smolkin, L.B., & Donovan, C.A. (2001). The contexts of comprehension: The information book read aloud, comprehension acquisition, and comprehension instruction in a first-grade classroom. *The Elementary School Journal*, 102(2), 97-122.
- Tiedt, I.M. (2000). *Teaching with picture books in the middle school*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Trelease, J. (1989). *The new read-aloud handbook*. New York: Penguin.
- Tyree, R.B., Fiore, T.A., & Cook, R.A. (1994). Instructional materials for diverse learners: Features and considerations for textbook design. *Remedial and Special Education*, 15, 363-377.

Vardell, S.M., Hadaway, N.L., & Young, T.A. (2006). Matching books and readers:

Selecting literature for English learners. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(8), 734-741.

Vaughn, S. & Edmonds, M. (2006). Reading comprehension for older readers.

Intervention in School and Clinic, 41(3), 131-137.

Villano, T.L. (2005). Should social studies textbooks become history? A look at

alternative methods to activate schema in the intermediate classroom. *The*

Reading Teacher 59(2), 122-130.

Wysocki, B. (2004). A thousand words: The picture-perfect link to the curriculum.

School Library Journal, 50(4), 8-12.

Zambo, D. (2006). Using thought-bubble pictures to assess students' feelings about

reading. *The Reading Teacher* 59(8), 798-803.

Zarnowski, M., & Gallagher, A.F. (Eds.). (1993). *Children's literature & social studies:*

Selecting and using notable books in the classroom. Dubuque, IA:

Kendall/Hunt.

Children's Picture Book Reference List

- Brimner, L.D. (2000). *Glaciers*. Danbury, CT: Children's Press.
- Christian, S.J. (2003). *Land of liberty: Iowa*. Mankato, MN: Captstone Press.
- Collard, S.B. (III). (2005). *The prairie builders: Reconstructing America's lost grasslands*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Ditchfield, C. (2002). *A true book: Coal*. New York: Children's Press.
- Esbaum, J. (2005). *Ste-e-e-e-eamboat a-comin'!* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Fowler, A. (1997). *Icebergs, ice caps, and glaciers*. Danbury, CT: Children's Press.
- Gallant, R.A. (1998). *Limestone caves*. New York: Franklin Watts.
- Gensicke, M.A. (1995). *I is for Iowa*. Ames: Iowa State University Press.
- Gensicke, M.A. (2001). *I is for Iowa People*. Ames: Iowa State University Press.
- Gerrard, R. (1996). *Wagons West*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Giesecke, E. (2000). *State government*. Chicago: Heinemann.
- Gilliland, J.H. (2000). *Steamboat! The story of captain Blanche Leathers*. New York: Dorling Kindersley Publishing.
- Heinrichs, A. (2006). *Welcome to the U.S.A.: Iowa*. Chanhassen, MN: The Child's World.
- Kay, V. (2000). *Covered wagons, bumpy trails*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Kittinger, J.S. (1997). *A look at rocks: From coal to kimerlite*. New York: Franklin Watts.
- Knapp, B. (1992). *Glacier*. Danbury, CT: Grolier Education Corporation.
- Pierce, P. A. (2003). *H is for Hawkeye*. Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press.

Pierce, P. (2006). *Numbers in a row: An Iowa number book*. Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press.

Sis, P. (2004). *The train of states*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Snedden, R. (2002). *Energy from fossil fuels*. Chicago: Heinemann.

Teitelbaum, M. (2003). *Profiles of the Presidents: Herbert Hoover*. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books.

Zeck, P., & Zeck, G. (1982). *Mississippi sternwheelers*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books.

Appendix A

Student Surveys and Thought-Bubble Pictures

Student Survey of Social Studies Unit 1: Studying Regions

Please answer the following questions.

1. Was the unit on *Regions* interesting to you? Why or why not?
2. What are some key concepts you have learned about *Regions*?
3. What did you like best about the unit on *Regions*? Why?

Student Survey of Social Studies Unit 2: Middle West

Please answer the following questions.

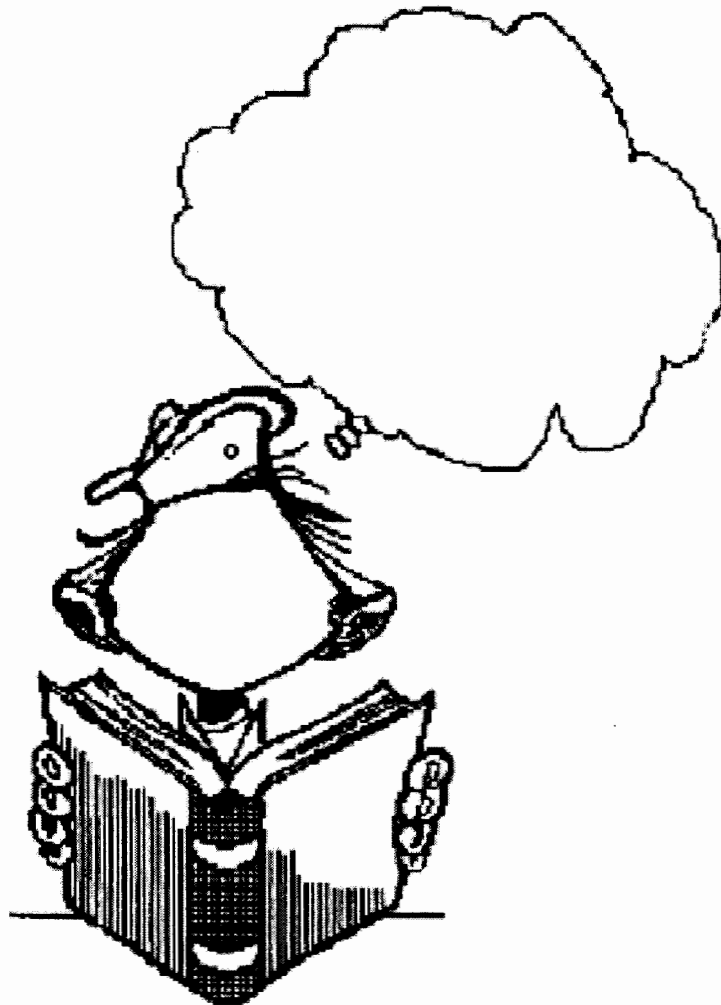
1. Was the unit on *Middle West* interesting to you? Why or why not?
2. What are some key concepts you have learned about the *Middle West*?
3. What did you like best about the unit on the *Middle West*? Why?

Student Survey of Social Studies Unit 3: Iowa Studies

Please answer the following questions.

1. Is the unit on *Iowa Studies* interesting to you? Why or why not?
2. What are some key concepts you have learned about *Iowa Studies*?
3. What did you like best about the unit on *Iowa Studies*? Why?

The following are two blank thought-bubble pictures. The first figure is for boys to complete and the second figure is for girls to complete. This boy (or girl) is reading a social studies textbook on Regions of the United States. Draw what he (or she) looks like as he (or she) looks like as he (or she) reads and what goes on in his (or her) head.



This boy is reading a book. Draw what he looks like as he reads and what goes on in his head.



This girl is reading a book. Draw what she looks like as she reads and what goes on in her head.

Appendix B

Student Interview Questions

Possible Interview Questions for the Students- these interviews will be semi-structured

1. What are some things you learned this year in social studies? How did you learn these things?
2. How do you feel when you read your social studies textbook?
3. Do you understand how to read a textbook (captions, bold face type, structure)?
4. Do you feel that the use of picture books increased your comprehension of the social studies material? Why or why not?
5. Did the picture books help you understand what some of the key vocabulary words meant? If so, how?
6. Do you think you were more involved in class discussions when your teacher used picture books?
7. What did you like best about using picture books?
8. Have you ever used a textbook before fourth grade?

Appendix C

Teacher Interview Questions

Possible Interview Questions for the Classroom Teacher

1. How engaged were the students during the social studies units where only the textbook was used?
2. How engaged were the students during the social studies unit on Iowa Studies where you used picture books as a pre-reading activity?
3. How involved in class discussions were the students during the social studies units where only the textbook was used?
4. How involved in class discussions were the students during the Iowa Studies unit where you used picture books?
5. Do you feel that the use of picture books enhanced the students' comprehension of the content area material?
6. Do you feel that the use of picture books increased the students understanding of key vocabulary words used in the content area textbook?
7. Will you continue to use picture books as a pre-reading activity for your content area curriculum?
8. What did you like best about using the picture books?
9. Is there anything you would do differently?
10. What were some of the benefits of using picture books with your students?
11. What were some disadvantages of using picture books?
12. How did you use the picture books?

13. Did your students receive better grades in social studies when picture books were used?